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The Road to Making A Cross-cultural Web-based English as a Foreign Language Project More Accessible Now: Reflections from the Chinese Perspective on the Pre-take-off and Test Stages of the TPIC Teaching and Research Project between the Pacific University and Wenzhou Medical College

Desheng Yang

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The Road to Making A Cross-cultural Web-based English as a Foreign Language Project More Accessible Now: Reflections from the Chinese Perspective on the Pre-take-off and Test Stages of the TPIC Teaching and Research Project between the Pacific University and Wenzhou Medical College

Posted on **March 1, 2005** by **Editor**



By **Yang Desheng** <21wyds@sohu.com>
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This paper explores how a cross-culture web-based teaching and research project between two very different and widely separated educational systems has been developed, managed and supervised, with focus on the challenges, and benefits in its first two stages. Then, two more cross-culture cases are presented to further illustrate the nature, gains and problems concerned so that a better understanding is given to the computer-based project of this kind. Finally, this article concludes with the significance of the successes of TPIC: with the Internet-related technology, the software and hardware currently available, our experience and mode of international cooperation, which is applicable for other colleges and universities in China or in other developing countries, though far away from one another. Through our example, others can hopefully carry out similar distance education projects.

.01 **Background Information** ([return to index](#))

What is TPIC?

TPIC stands for the Trans-Pacific Interactive Classroom, an inter-university, interdisciplinary project in web-based interactive classroom across the Pacific Ocean between Pacific University, in the US state Oregon, and Wenzhou Medical College (WMC, for short, hereafter) in China's coastal city Wenzhou, Zhejiang province. It started on Feb. 2nd, 2004 when Professor Jeffrey Barlow returned to Pacific after his trip to WMC. From then on, TPIC has been developed, supervised and managed by Professor Jeffrey Barlow on the Pacific side and Associate Professor Yang Desheng on the Chinese side (For more:).

Description of the Course and Participants

The course offered on the test stage is American Literature, or to be more exact, US Literature by Dr. Tim Thompson of the Pacific University, Oregon. Engl 229 is an "introduction to selected American authors and themes" (*Pacific Catalogue* 65). Our basic goal will be to acquaint or re-acquaint ourselves a) with key texts by U.S. writers, b) with some of the literary terms commonly employed in analyzing literature, c) with the social, political, religious, biographical, intellectual, and aesthetic contexts to U.S. lit, and d) with reading strategies that help us better understand literature's power, pleasure, and beauty.

(<http://bcis.pacificu.edu/nwacc/crs/uslit/index.php.courses>). This course started, as scheduled, on Sept. 7th 2004, and ran twice a week until Jan. 14th 2005.

All the participants are English majors, were juniors in the year 2002, and in their 5th semester. They are the first group in English majors of the English Program, a newly established one at WMC that started to enroll students in Sept. 2002. Of all the 61 course takers, who took the TEST FOR ENGLISH MAJORS GRADE 4 the first time in their 4th semester in May 2002, over 91% of them passed it. It is a national test required of English majors before graduation. What is more, about half of them got good or excellent test scores. As the listening part of the test contains dialog and passages equivalent to those of VOA or BBC English Programs, the majority

of the language learners are supposed to have the ability to follow the lectures by the native speaker of English when the course was conducted. These English majors are hard-working and highly motivated, an opinion that is shared by both their Chinese teachers of English and their American and Canadian teachers. For example, they requested that they be offered the English course to further improve their listening and speaking abilities even without any credits earned in their third year, even with an already heavy workload.

.02 **Goals of TPIC** ([return to index](#))

The general goal is to test the feasibility of sharing classes in real-time between two different and widely separated educational institutions so that we can expand the bilateral teaching and research projects between the Pacific University and Wenzhou Medical College through the Internet.

To be more specific, what is expected to achieve on the Chinese side in the first two stages is as follows:

First, through TPIC, we hope we can improve our level of application of multi-media and Internet-based-or-related technology to EFL instruction and tapping the huge resources of the Internet. As is mentioned above, ours is a newly established English Program and we need technical support and aid in this area.

Secondly, by working together with the Pacific teachers, we want to cultivate the abilities and skills of our EFL teaching staff in the computer-mediated teaching and learning domain and then make better use of the school facilities available to help the students, especially the English majors here, to improve their language skills.

Thirdly, with the English courses offered by the native English-speaking teacher, the English majors here can not only learn modern English, but can also make use of the rich teaching and learning materials from the Pacific English Department.

Fourthly, by starting from scratch with the researchers and computer professionals to jointly develop, manage and supervise this project, we are able to accumulate the experience and master the expertise needed, and develop closer ties so that we may lay a better foundation for the third stage of TPIC, when the teachers and students on both sides can carry out the interactive classrooms in real time.

.03 **Challenges and Benefits** ([return to index](#))

To start with, what troubled us for nearly eight months, from early February to the middle of September, was deciding which application programs to use to transmit, via the Internet, the sound and pictures to and fro across the Pacific. The reasons why we have used so much time to this end is not that we don't know how to get good programs, but that we wanted to get

programs that were both good and free of charge. Our consideration is that we should reduce the costs as much as possible so that this project can be conducted in as economical and efficient way as possible and, therefore, make it as widely applicable as possible. We had tried such programs free of charge online, such as the iVisit, QQ and Messenger. None of them served us well. It was not until we finally chose the Skype for audio feed and the Microsoft Netmeeting for video feed with two computers for each purpose that we obtained satisfactory sound and pictures. By then, it had taken us more than 100 e-mails sent back and forth to achieve this. However, technically speaking, such a long process enabled the personnel on the Chinese side especially to be familiar with the knowledge and improve their skills in seeking the information and creatively combining the application programs needed for this project through the Internet.

Another barrier to remove was the reluctance of the personnel on the intranet control center, or the campus network center, for taking away some of the anti-virus programs, such as firewalls, which serve as countermeasures for the protection of all the computers on both campuses from the attack of hackers or viruses. The delay in solving this problem may have meant the failure of such a project elsewhere; for the TPIC, it resulted in the failure to carry out the interactive classroom in time because such anti-virus measures also prevented the input of audio and video feed from Pacific. At first, such a problem was not identified even if it caused serious trouble because the project had been started and experimented at home on the Chinese side. Only after other possible sources of trouble were excluded did we begin to get down to this problem. By then, two weeks had passed and this waste of time created doubt and worry among the students and some of the teachers here. Had it not been for the previous successful TPIC tests at home and great confidence and determination of the teacher in charge on the Chinese side, this project might have been given up. But the solution is simple. A cable line, with an independent account and IP, is installed in a multimedia room exclusively for this project, with the campus intranet separated from this cable line and running on another computer in the same room. In this way, even if the computers working on the independent cable line in the room are attacked by web viruses, the campus intranet is not. From this experience, we see how important it is to get the support of the departments concerned and, from that point on, we have kept in constant communication.

With the Internet-based technology of both hardware and software guaranteed, we could carry on our project as planned. Now, difficulties arose from the instructional activities mainly on how to help the students adapt themselves to this interactive classroom, as most of them had long been accustomed to the "spoon-fed" methods. Many of them felt uncomfortable with "student-centered" approaches such as project-oriented learning. On the other hand, Tim Thompson, the lecturer of this web-based American Literature class, also felt a bit frustrated as fewer students asked or answered his questions. With this being the case, it was then evident that we could achieve better teaching results, and that success depended on whether and how soon the students here could form another learning habit, and become active in class by forming their questions and answers. To solve this problem, we demonstrated the strategies of the good reader first. Next, we had regular exchanges of views and ideas on how to help students get rid

of their bad reading habits between the Chinese teacher in charge and the lecturer Tim Thompson on the US side. To bridge the gap between a poor learner and a good learner, Dr. Tim offered questions on the BBS for this class so that students learned to read with some purposes in mind. In addition, they were required to put at first their questions on the BBS on their own. With the patient instruction and help, most of the students became so active in class that sometimes two or three students stood up simultaneously, raising or answering questions. Finally, they were so interested in this interactive class that they put forth too many questions, in class and on their BBS, for Dr Tim alone to deal with in time. The good teaching results were evidenced by Professor Jeffrey Barlow's interview with all the participants one by one on his trip to WMC in December 2004 and January 2005. In this test stage, most of the students succeeded in forming good learning habits, and were well prepared for the third stage of TPIC, and had become the project-oriented learning type.

Besides the good learning habits of thinking and analyzing the students here have formed through this cross-cultural web-based class, they have not only developed their abilities to utilize the Internet and its huge resources for their studies, but have also created more interest in these applications for EFL instruction in the English Program. This is because in order to follow the lectures and fulfill their assignment or homework, they frequented the Internet for their education's sake. With the help of their teachers, they learned to access different websites for the information needed in this class. The more they resorted to the Internet for help, the more they found it important and necessary to get online for their studies, and in the end they required the school authorities to provide a computer room exclusively for the English Program. The availability of such a multimedia room and ease access to the Internet, in turn, made it possible to encourage more teachers to assign the English majors of different levels here more web-based tasks or exercises. Such a healthy and favorable cycle is very conducive to the development of this two-year-old English Program. This Program can now provide opportunities for its teaching faculty to shift to the Computer-assisted Instruction encouraged by the government, and also allows for their students to cultivate their online information-seeking ability required in the Syllabus for English Majors in China. By taking its first step in going international, and accumulating experience in cross-culture web-based projects, their experiences can be used by the other programs or specialties of Wenzhou Medical College.

.04 **The Other Two Case Studies** ([return to index](#))

TPIC is not the first of Cross-culture, Computer-mediated Instruction Programs in China. Back in 1998, the high school attached to the Chinese People's University launched Cross-Pacific Classroom with a middle school from Canada near the end of April, when the high school students on both sides saw and talked to each other face to face in real time through web-based conferencing software, marking China's first attempt in this field. This unprecedented test was followed by further online interactive classroom collaborative programs with New York State University and the University's branch in Kanton, started from the US on Dec. 22nd 1999 and from China on April 6th 2000. There were such courses offered as American Culture and English Dialogues, and these were done successively. On October 29th 2001, it carried out another

similar program with the high school attached to Daban Education College from Japan, offering mathematics to each other in English. All these teaching and research projects mentioned above were the “firsts” of their kind in China. Conducted for the high schools, they were all based on the advanced tele-communications technology available then such as on-line video-conferencing, electronic white board, and web-camera to carry pictures, sound and words in real time, enabling teachers and students located far away from one another to communicate, extending the coverage of trainees. The successes in these projects were not only due to the full backing of the school authorities, but also to the great importance the school authorities attached to the management and supervision of the web-based application, such as regulations and rules for the Internet surfers (An Junfu:44.2003).

The other case to be examined is called the Web-based Project Learning and EFL Learners, created by Penya Gu from the English Department of Suzhou University. It was a cross-cultural collaborative online writing project conducted in 1999 between 20 Chinese students at Suzhou University and 28 American students at South Polytechnic State University of Georgia. Though this cross-cultural project was not so successful as it had been hoped to be, and only lasted for one term, it was nevertheless concluded “...that web-based learning projects do have potential in motivating EFL learners and bringing about positive learning effects, but the key still lies in how they are managed and supported by learners, teachers and administrators at all levels” (CITATION NEEDED). This case is more related to TPIC in that all the participants were college students, as our students are. Similar to the above case, this author also points out the importance in guiding the proper use of the computer and the Internet and gaining the support from the departments involved (Gu Peiya:2002). These two cases differ from the TPIC in that these projects were conducted in the two famous and nationally key universities in China, while the latter has been done in a very new English Program with their first group of students as the participants. Also in contrast is that the latter has gained more than its Chinese counterpart- which was the case at Suzhou University.

.05 **Conclusion and Significance** [\(return to index\)](#)

The advancements in computer-mediated instruction achieved so far, in fact, have made it possible to carry out teaching activities in a large scale, by sharing teaching and learning resources and conducting individualistic training activities. The success in the web-based teaching and research at colleges or universities does not depend so much on whether the facilities are currently available or not in China, as many people wrongly believe. That is beside the point we are arguing, because the majority of the colleges or universities have several multi-media rooms and the equipment available for computer-assisted instructional programs, even a cross-cultural one. What matters here is whether the university authorities concerned support such project or not, whether the college staff are willing to make their effort to launch this project, and whether they realize the huge potential of the Internet in its role in modern higher learning and continuing education.

The failure of Suzhou University to achieve better results and the series of successful projects in

the affiliated middle school to the Chinese People's University are the best evidence in this case. The successes in the first two stages of TPIC are another piece of evidence to support this conclusion, for even in a medical college, a newly established English Program with only a history of two years can have started from scratch and carried out a collaborative cross-Pacific intercollegiate research and teaching project so successfully. As a matter of fact, colleges and universities like Wenzhou Medical College are in bad need of cross-cultural projects to promote their development and strengthen their competitiveness. This is because the market of the institutions of higher learning in China is opening wider and wider to the outside world on the one hand and, on the other hand, because the Central Government of China has focused its investment on a few nation-key universities. So, the majority of colleges and universities have to face fiercer competition both from home and abroad. Another reason for the need of improving and depending more on computer-assisted instruction is the pressure of lack of enough competent teaching faculty caused by the unprecedented expansion of enrollment throughout this country. Such rapid and large-scale expansion encouraged by the government in order to delay the increase in unemployment and promote the development of higher education in China has caused some problems, and the countermeasures taken by the government to limit the ratio of the number of teachers to students and to guarantee the quality of education and emphasis put on the application of modern multimedia technology have forced colleges and universities here to both change their traditional ways of teaching and learning instruction and equip themselves with computers and cable lines for accessing the Internet.

With the hardware available, they find what troubles them most now is how to make good use of these facilities. That is, how to most effectively transition into the linking of network to the application of network, while using the Internet in China (Yu Shengquan: 2003). Much research related to cross-culture web-based instruction recently in China has been done on theoretical facets, such as the three key factors in Sino-US distance education: transmitting systems of educational resources and theories, technology in course programming (Shunli: 2003), and the internationalization of the inexorable trend for the development of higher education in the 21st century (Zhang Dongyu and Zhengyan: 2004). All these are vital in the integration and development of modern distance education and international cooperation between institutions of higher learning (Ma Deyi: 2004). It is shared by all these articles that the advanced technology and expertise in computer-mediated instruction will play a vital role in the development of China's colleges and universities, but difficulties both in software and hardware and cultural differences are also stressed as obstacles to the success in such project. Thus, it gives such impression that only with very strong technical support in computer science is it impossible to carry out such international project. But unfortunately, most of the colleges and universities are not strong in this respect. It is true that computer professionals are needed, but are not necessarily the prerequisite of engaging in such international project, because the programs needed for such project are available in XP or Windows operational systems. Considering the TPIC project was developed and tested by an EFL teacher on the Chinese side, we can say that such cross-cultural web-based projects do not require high levels of computer-related or Internet-related expertise of the researchers concerned. Therefore, it follows that successes in the first two stages of TPIC have proved that the majority of colleges or universities, which are like Wenzhou

Medical College in China, have the ability to launch projects of this type with other universities in countries where people can get on line. The future for such cross-culture project in China, as well as in many other developing countries, is very bright, and there is a large market waiting for us to open up.

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17 THOUGHTS ON "THE ROAD TO MAKING A CROSS-CULTURAL WEB-BASED ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE PROJECT MORE ACCESSIBLE NOW: REFLECTIONS FROM THE CHINESE PERSPECTIVE ON THE PRE-TAKE-OFF AND TEST STAGES OF THE TPIC TEACHING AND RESEARCH PROJECT BETWEEN THE PACIFIC UNIVERSITY AND WENZHOU MEDICAL COLLEGE"

Kristian

on **January 31, 2014 at 4:56 PM** said:

What's up Dear, are you in fact visiting this website on a regular basis, if so after that you will definitely get pleasant know-how.

Leesa

on **February 1, 2014 at 3:43 AM** said:

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on **February 1, 2014 at 12:16 PM** said:

After going over a handful of the articles on your site, I honestly appreciate your way of blogging. I bookmarked it to my bookmark webpage list and will be checking back in the near future. Take a look at my website too and let me know what you think.

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on **February 1, 2014 at 3:34 PM** said:

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Wilson

on **February 1, 2014 at 10:13 PM** said:

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when i read this piece of writing i thought i could also make comment due to this sensible paragraph.

Tammi

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Network Marketing In China

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empower zone credit

on **February 2, 2014 at 4:47 PM** said:

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on **February 3, 2014 at 12:44 AM** said:

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so here it occurs.

Tracy

on **February 3, 2014 at 4:44 AM** said:

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on **February 3, 2014 at 1:06 PM** said:

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at web, except I know I am getting know-how daily by reading the good articles.

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on **February 5, 2014 at 12:07 PM** said:

Hello i am kavin, its my first occasion to commenting anywhere, when i read this post i
thought i could
also make comment due to this brilliant article.